



The evolution of Chinese memes

Contents

Where do memes come from?

Celebrities

TV series

Reality shows

Mascot memes and the monetization of internet culture

A social game without borders

No age restrictions

No geographical restriction

Impact on social life

Helping people with social phobia to solve social problems

Memes are ruining our ability to express ourselves



**Where do
memes
come
from?**



Memes are often combined with current hot 🔥 events and characters. With the communication advantages of social network platforms, they can easily resonate with netizens and thus improve the discussion of online topics. In addition to popular stars and Internet celebrities, some popular variety shows, movies, TV series 📺 and animation works can be used by netizens to make emoticons 😊.

The booming development of memes has promoted a craze of a nationwide online carnival. On the one hand, memes provide an outlet for grassroots netizens to vent their emotions. The fast-paced modern life 🏢 has brought people a sense of tension and pressure. Social media has gradually become a pressure relief valve for people. Making and spreading memes is one of the ways for netizens to get rid of the pressure in reality.



表情包多与当下热点事件和人物相结合，借助社交网络平台的传播优势，很容易迅速引起网民共鸣，进而提高网络话题的讨论度。除了当红 🔥 的明星与网络红人，一些热播的综艺节目、电影 🎬、电视剧 📺 以及动漫作品都可以成为网民制作表情包的素材，比如最近火热的“葛优躺”“友谊的小船说翻就翻”“爸爸去哪儿萌娃表情”“黑人问号脸 ? ”表情包系列等。

表情包的蓬勃发展推动了全民网络狂欢的热潮。一方面，表情包给草根网民提供了宣泄情绪的出口。快节奏的现代生活给人们带来了紧张感和压迫感，社交媒体逐渐成为人们释放压力的减压阀，制作与传播表情包是网民摆脱现实压力的方式之一。在表情包制作与传播过程中，网民参与了讨论、收藏、转发等网络互动，表情包所包含的诙谐搞笑元素让网民获得了乐趣 😊。另一方面，表情包给了网民表达意见的机会。互联网的平等性和开放性赋予草根网民话语权，最大限度满足了草根网民的认同需求。网民自制表情包所代表的草根文化，是对主流精英文化的一种反抗，也是对主流价值观的一种颠覆。网民可以通过恶搞的方式对经典话语进行解构和再生产，营造属于自己的话语场。

Celebrities

Huang Zitao, Chinese singer 🎤 actor, was born in Qingdao. He was a member of the Korean men's group EXO and the Chinese team EXO-M. Many netizens in China like to use pictures of him as memes. One reason is that he does not pay much attention to expression management, the expression of feelings will be particularly abundant, so the static has a dynamic effect. Netizens can easily find Huang's memes on the following website.



黄子韬，中国歌手 🎤、演员，出生于青岛。他是韩国男子团体EXO和中国男子团体EXO-M的成员。中国许多网民喜欢用他的照片作为表情包。一是他不太注重表情的管理，表情的感情会特别丰富，所以静态有动态的效果。网友们可以在以下网站上轻松找到黄子韬的表情包。



Video sources for the memes via link below. 📌

Learn more about the show via link below. 📌



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3dezFzsNss>



<https://reurl.cc/9L8Va>

These memes feature Yue Yunpeng who is a Chinese actor and xiangsheng performer. These memes are all derived from his xiangsheng performance.📌

Memes from Yue Yunpeng's xiangsheng performance



See more videos: ▼



TV series

This is also one of the most fascinating places in the expression packed culture. No matter how old TV 📺 series, stars or musicians, it is possible to “turn popular” by the memes.

Among the numerous TV dramas, the most popular ❤️ ones are *My Fair Princess* and *My Own Swordsman*. Many netizens memes are from these two TV series. *My Own Swordsman* and *My Fair Princess* are classic comedies, the actors have wonderful performances, the plot is rich and the actor's expression is also very diverse, so it is very suitable for making a variety of memes.

What's more, let's talk about the memes themselves. Instead of words, memes are used to express meaning. The most important !! thing is that memes are funny 😄 and diverse. The funny nature of the *My Own Swordsman* memes is beyond doubt. As for the diversity, *My Own Swordsman* is written to resemble real life, which makes it diverse.

这也是表情包文化最为迷人👍的地方之一，不管多么陈旧的电视剧、明星、烂梗，都有可能借着表情包的东风，再“翻红”一把。

在《还珠格格》“回锅”的过程中，尔康成了心机boy😏；容嬷嬷化身针灸店医师，与尔康、五阿哥纠缠不清，至于全体成员，则在微博网友@好英俊的笔下，被p上校服，重温了一把“在小学上学👦是一种怎样的体验”。

These memes are from *My Fair Princess*, a famous Chinese comedy 📺 from 1998. Learn more about the show via link below. 📄

Some Chinese netizens have created an account on weibo specifically to post memes about *My Fair Princess*. ▼



<https://reurl.cc/x4q7z>

These memes are from My Own Swordsman. a famous 🇨🇳 Chinese TV comedy series 📺 from 2006. Learn more about the TV series via link below. 🔗



<https://reurl.cc/YRz0X>

Memes from *My Own Swordsman* TV series. 📺



Some websites 🌐 have even created collections of *My Own Swordsman* memes. 📌



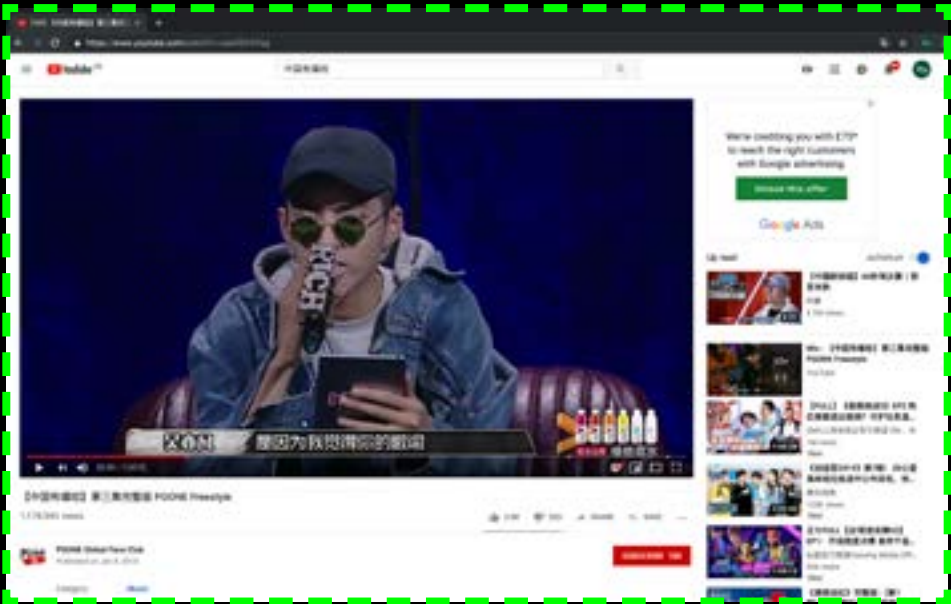
Reality shows

In the context of the Internet 🌐, the number of memes has become a key factor to measure the popularity of stars, and even movies 🎬, TV series and variety shows. Like Wu Yifan's "do you have freestyle" from *China has hip-hop*, meme packages have been used by many netizens. As said in the official explanation, *China has hip hop* exceeded 100 million views within four hours of its release, and over the next three days, "freestyle" was mentioned repeatedly by Internet users and the media, increasing the number of views of the program to 150 million.

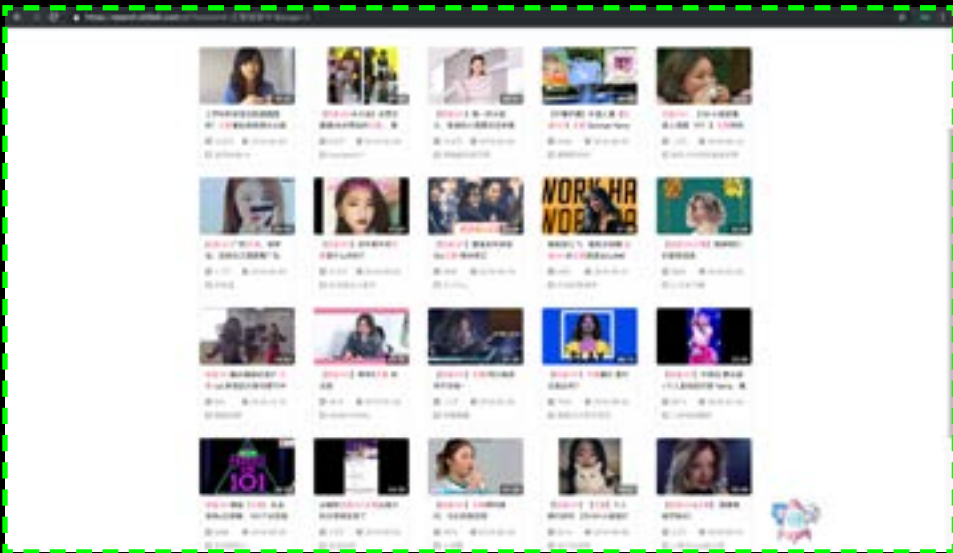
In 2018, Wang Ju also contributed a lot of memes in the reality show 📺 *creating 101*. The audience of the program began to expand from star-chasing boys and girls to a broader group, because Wang Ju started a broader discussion about women's rights.

在互联网语境里，能不能成为表情包，已经成了衡量明星甚至是影视剧📺、综艺话题度的关键因素。吴亦凡一句“你有freestyle吗”，让《中国有嘻哈》率先出圈，综艺还没火，表情包先走了一波流量。官方这样解释，《中国有嘻哈》上线4小时即破1亿，随后的三天中，“freestyle”被网友和媒体反复提及，这档节目的播放量增加至1.5亿📈。等到了今年，这种手法又被《创造101》所用。伴随着“陶渊明”“菊外人”“一菊两得”等梗，王菊的表情包开始在朋友圈疯传。百度指数显示，王菊的热度从接近于0到7万+只用了不到一周，微信指数涨幅高达453.32%，比蔡徐坤、鹿晗等明星都要高。而这时，也被认为是《创造101》出圈的节点。节目的受众开始从追星男孩👦、女孩，辐射到更为广阔的群体，因为王菊激起了更大范围的关于女权的讨论。

Some netizens cut out wonderful clips of reality shows and posted them on the Internet to provide material for other netizens to make memes.



Wang ju's performance in the reality show is loved by many fans. ↓



Some of Wang's fans 🍌 have set up accounts on weibo to post her memes to show support for their idol. 📱



How to make memes?

Meitu XiuXiu (Meitu Pic) is an image editing software that is mostly used in Mainland China🇨🇳. It is available on Google Play and Appstore. It provides tools for editing photos: filters, retouching, collage, scenes, frames, and photo decorations etc.

Edit

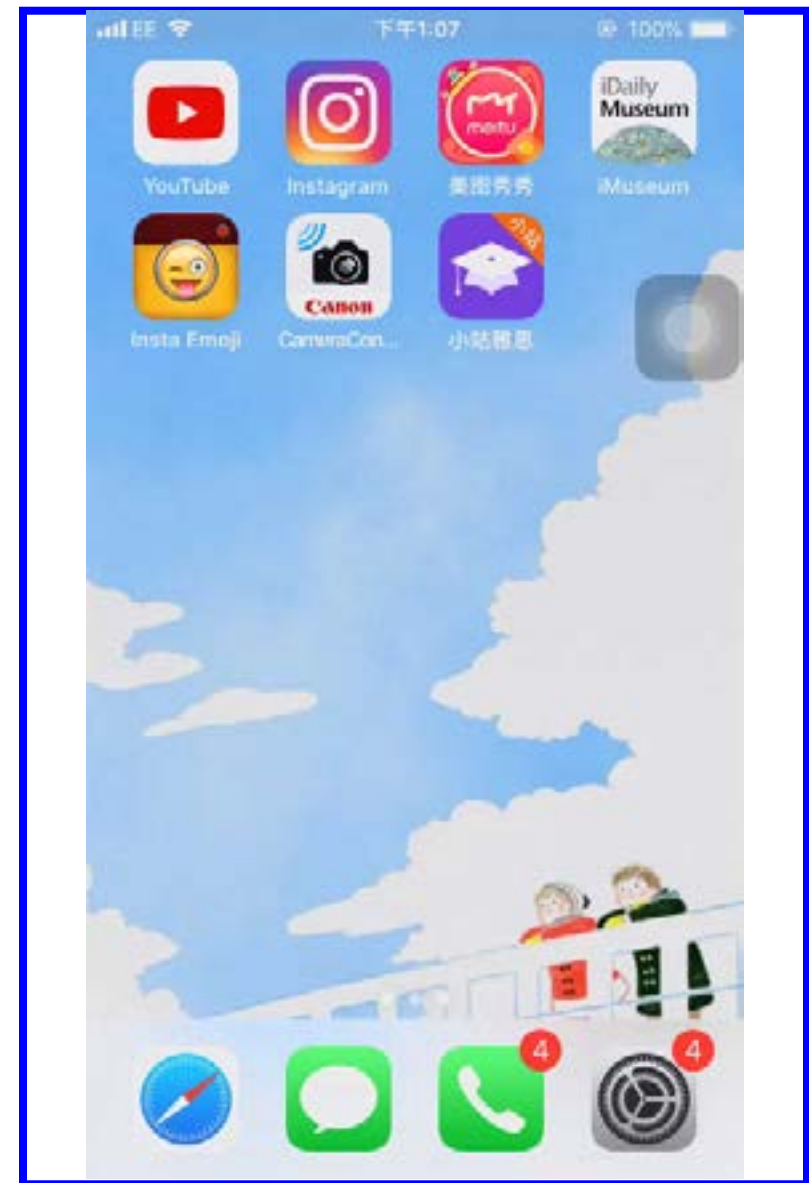
MeituPic provides a number of photo-editing tools🔧. The major functions are Auto enhance, Edit, Enhance, Filters, Frames, Magic Brush, Mosaic, Text and Blur.

Beauty Retouch


There are seven major functions for retouching the photo by using meitupic: they are auto retouch, smoothen and whiten skin, remove blemish, slimming, remove dark circles and bags under eyes👁️👁️, taller and more enhanced eyes.


Collage

Collage has four types: template, freestyle, poster, PicStrip, where up to nine photos can be inserted.



Mascot memes and the monetization of internet culture

Data  shows that driven by the emoji economy, the profit of China's online mall Taobao has increased by nearly 40% from last year, and the post-1995 and post-2000 generations account for nearly 50% of consumers. As Taobao's cooperation with meme makers becomes more mature and complete, more and more young users are willing to pay for the memes they like. More and more companies are also developing products around the emoji and meme characters.

数据  显示，在表情包经济的带动下，淘宝二次元行业今年同比增长近40%，消费者中95后、00后占比近50%。而随着淘宝与IP官方的合作愈发成熟和完整，越来越多的年轻用户愿意为喜欢的IP买单。

LINE FRIENDS

LINE has a rich meme library, the core of which is LINE FRIENDS consisting of 7 members including Brown 🐻 Bear, Kenny Rabbit 🐰 and Shantou. In the initial stage of the meme making, LINE could earn two or three hundred million dollars in revenue a year by selling the right to use the memes.

With the increasing popularity of LINE FRIENDS among users, LINE FRIENDS started to do expand their business. In addition to peripheral toy products, it has also launched LINE OFFLINE - office worker, a brand animation and LINETOWN, an animation series for children 🧒.

LINE有着丰富的表情库，最为核心的是由布朗熊 🐻、可妮兔 🐰 馒头小人等7位成员组成的LINE FRIENDS。最开始的阶段，LINE通过售卖表情包的使用权，一年就能获得两三亿美元的收入。

而随着LINE FRIENDS在用户群体中的知名度和受欢迎度不断提升 📈，又做起了衍生品生意。除了玩具周边，还推出了品牌动画片《LINE OFFLINE -上班族-》和面向儿童 🧒 的动画《LINETOWN》等影视类产品。



Image of LINE FRIENDS👯. More image sources via link code below.📌



In the second stage of meme transformation, the company not only launched many dolls, tea cups☺ and other daily necessities, but also turned its focus to cross-industry, and successively launched co-branded products with cosmetics brands, clothing brands, LAMY pens✍ and other brands.📌



<https://www.linefriends.com/>

Kumamon

As the official mascot of Kumamoto Prefecture, Kumamoto bears 🐻 have a number of important responsibilities, such as image spokesperson, PR, and expression pack ambassador.

In order to to make a name for itself, Kumamoto Prefecture has tried to participate in talent shows, and use the media to hype itself e.g. “our Kumamoto bear has disappeared in Osaka for a month”, calling on people to “find kumamoto bear” and other activities.

According to data 📊, in the year of 2015 alone, sales of Kumamoto bear products (dolls, toys, food packaging boxes, etc.) reached 64.3 billion yen.

提到超级表情包，就不得不提熊本熊——一个年收入33亿的公务员。

作为熊本县的官方吉祥物，熊本熊身负形象代言人、PR、表情包大使等多项重任。为了帮熊本县打响知名度，它尝试过街拍、参加选秀比赛、借媒体炒作“我们的熊本熊在大阪消失一个月了”号召大家去“寻找熊本熊”等多个活动。但真正让它大红的，却是一张诡异 🤪 的表情包——熊本熊站在火堆旁，配文“别问为什么，撒旦光芒照耀你”。这张贴图被上传至美国某网站，引起网友热议。自那以后，与熊本熊有关表情包让网友狂欢到现在，而熊本熊出道四年即为熊本县带来超过2000亿日元的观光旅游收入，甚至拉动了整个九州地区 🗺️ 的旅游产业。

数据显示，仅2015年一年，熊本熊衍生产品(公仔、玩具、食品包装盒等)的销售额高达643亿日元。

Kumamoto actively attends publicity activities for the government.



In September 2017, the Kumamoto bear coffee shop in Nanjing opened to the joy of many customers.





**A social
game
without
borders**

No age restrictions

With no boundaries, meme culture shows great inclusiveness. There is no age limit -- the elderly have found their place in this meme feast. Young people prefer black, white and grey. While the old people's memes feature mostly beautiful women, flowers 🌸, butterflies and other real scenes. The more vulgar the content, the more young people like it, while the middle aged and old people are all for positive energy and love for life.

由于没有边界，表情包文化展现出了极大的包容性。没有年龄限制——在这场表情包盛宴中，中老年群体也找到了自己的定位。年轻人偏爱黑白灰，走的是漫画风。而中老年表情包则主打欢天喜地风，画面主体多为美女👩、鲜花🌸、蝴蝶等实景。越低俗、越贱兮兮的内容，年轻人越喜欢，而中老年表情包则清一色的正能量，饱含对生活的热爱。



Memes that older generations prefer.



Memes that the young generation prefer.



No geographical restriction

Netizens have already started to use material from abroad to make their memes. Song Mingguo who is from South Korea 🇰🇷, has become one of the most popular 🔥 memes on WeChat. Nick Young is an NBA player, but he became famous because of the “question mark face” meme; Gavin, the smirk boy, has travelled to China after becoming famous in the US 🇺🇸.

网友寻找素材的脚步早已踏出了国门，来自韩国的宋民国，因在《超人回来了》中的一系列表情帝操作，成为了微信最受欢迎的表情包之一；Nick · Young本是一名NBA球员，却因“黑人问号脸”走进我们生活；而假笑男孩Gavin则是在美国爆红后，漂洋过海来到了中国。



Memes from Song Minguo, Appearing at *The Return of Superman* in 2014.



Memes from Nick Young.



Memes from Gavin.

Impact on social life

Helping people with social phobia to solve social problems

There is no doubt that memes are a product of Internet 🌐 culture. It is an embodiment of fragmentation. Small size, simple production, quick response to social hot spots; it is highly efficient dissemination. The production of emoticons is also not in pursuit of sophisticated products, but in the sense of humor and connotation. The frankness of expressing one's feelings exactly meets people's demand for quick access to information in the flood of information.

Asians are more reserved. In ordinary communication, expressions and body movements can be used to help express some information, but in online chatting, language is the only way. Thus, the appearance of memes makes up for this defect.

表情包是互联网文化的产物，这点毫无疑问。

它适应了碎片化传播的语境。体量小、制作简单、能够快速对社会热点🔥做出及时回应，概括起来，就是传播效率高。而表情包的制作，同样不追求制作精良，而是讲究搞笑和内涵，这种直抒胸臆的爽快，正好满足了人们在信息洪流中快速获取信息的需求。

而另一方面，表情包也是社交的润滑剂。那些在现实生活中沉默寡言，不善于社交的人可能在网络上发一些与自己形象完全不符的表情包，从而避免遭受孤立、融入主流并成为其一份子。而网聊非面对面的特征，也使得撕逼之前能有机会先思考几秒，发个表情包暂时缓解一下气氛。

A screenshot of young Chinese chatting with each other using memes on Wechat. 🇨🇳



Mememes are ruining our ability to express ourselves

There is no denying that as more and more people prefer sending mememes to express their feelings rather than words, their language skills are gradually declining without realising it. Just because we rely too much on mememes, all the ups and downs in life can be replaced by mememes, leading to emotional deficiency, and we are less and less able to speak 🗣️.

If we look at those who love ❤️ to send mememes, perhaps there is a common denominator: poor vocabulary. It's hard to ignore the fact that mememes do make communication shorter, and they are reducing many people's ability and patience to use words and sentences.

不可否认的是，随着越来越多的人喜欢发表情包胜于文字，他们的语言表达能力正逐渐下降，却不知晓。正因为我们对表情包过于依赖，生活上所有的酸甜苦辣，都能用表情包来替代，导致情绪被绑架，我们也越来越不会说话 🗣️ 了。

我们再去看看那些热衷于发表情包的人，或许都有着普遍的共性:表达词汇贫瘠。一个不得不重视的事实: 表情包确实让世界的沟通变得短平快，但它正降低每个人遣词造句的能力和耐心。

The Evolution of Chinese Memes

Designer and editor: YU HU

This is a student project submitted for the
MA Book Design course at the University
of Reading, 2019

The images and memes used in this are
all publicly available. I do not own the
rights to any of these images.

